

# **Communitarian Influence? Amitai Etzioni and the making of New Labour**

## **ABSTRACT**

From the mid 1990s there was much speculation, both popular and academic, about the role of communitarianism and, in particular, American communitarian Amitai Etzioni in the transformation of the Labour Party into 'New' Labour. A consensus emerged that even if Etzioni had not directly influenced the party, its policies and rhetoric were nonetheless fully consistent with his position. This article challenges that view, analysing Etzioni's work alongside the policies and other utterances of New Labour, and concluding that there are very few similarities and vast differences of emphasis and of substance. In many instances Etzioni is critical, both implicitly and explicitly, of New Labour's supposedly communitarian politics.

From the mid 1990s onwards, across a range of academic literature as well as in the press, there was a general consensus that the Israeli-American sociologist, Amitai Etzioni, in his new incarnation as founder of the US 'Communitarian Movement' and guru of the new communitarianism, had had a noticeable impact on the Labour Party in its transformation into 'New' Labour. A range of perspectives on and assessments of the relationship could be discerned: some, including the man himself, saw Etzioni as having held sway with politicians of all parties (Etzioni, 1995a, p. ix; 1997, back cover; Anderson and Davey, 1995; *Sunday Times* 1994, p. 3; Coote, 1995, p. 14); others accused New Labour of stealing Etzioni's language to reconcile Labour voters with neo-liberal policies (Levitas, 1998; Smith, 1997, p. 180; Coote, 1995, p. 14). Etzioni was held to have influenced Blair's thinking (and thus New Labour policy) on the family and society (Anderson and Mann, 1997, p. 245). The references to community and to rights and duties in the revised Clause IV were credited to Etzioni's influence (Lloyd, 1998, p. 28), as was the adoption of a position which attempted to steer a middle path between the free market and socialist solidarity (Crawford, 1996, p. 247; Crick, 1997, p. 7). All of these were reflected and reinforced by general references to Etzioni as Blair's or New Labour's guru (Toynbee and Walker, 2001, p. 37; Wilby, 2000, p. 9; James, 1998). Although they differ in their interpretation of its nature and significance, underlying all of these was a general view that there was a relationship between Etzioni's ideas and the shape that New Labour took under Blair's leadership.

The impression that Etzioni had been a significant influence on New Labour stems from a combination of claims made by Etzioni himself and the fact that leading politicians had mixed with and apparently consulted him, reinforced by an apparent similarity of language and sentiment. It is a documented fact that Etzioni met a number of politicians, particularly in 1995 while promoting the British edition of *The Spirit of Community*; it is impossible to show conclusively that any of them were influenced by him, or by his work. Assumptions have been made largely on the basis of apparent similarities of language and outlook between his work and New Labour's rhetoric. This article suggests that Etzioni's communitarianism is, in every significant aspect, incompatible with the party's policies and attitudes.

Etzioni's explicitly communitarian output begins with *The Spirit of Community*, published in the US in 1993 and in Britain in 1995, followed by *The New Golden Rule*, an attempt to provide some theoretical underpinning for the earlier book, in 1996, and concludes, so far as the New Labour connection is concerned, with the 2000 Demos pamphlet *The Third Way to a Good Society*.

*The Spirit of Community* is the most significant of these, as it was its British publication which drew commentators' attention to Etzioni and in which apparent similarities were to be found with New Labour's approach. *The Third Way to a Good Society* is important because it is an explicit response to Britain under New Labour. *The New Golden Rule* is less significant, but one aspect is worth mentioning. The book is primarily concerned with providing a theoretical underpinning for the policies advocated in *The Spirit of Community*, but in establishing the need for this, Etzioni undertakes a lengthy diagnosis of the ills of

contemporary American society, in particular excessive individualism and the aggressive pursuit of rights, and the decline of shared values. The way this is approached does raise some important questions about the apparent relationship with British politics.

In a number of places in the book, Etzioni suggests that his diagnosis of the pursuit of excessive autonomy at the cost of shared moral values applies to the US in particular, and not the UK or other European countries. In Great Britain, he claims, in many ways people have less autonomy than in the US. He cites such things as the Official Secrets Act, the Prevention of Terrorism Act (with its provision for detaining suspects without bringing them before a court), closed circuit television in public places (in the US, according to Etzioni, CCTV is generally confined to privately owned, commercial, spaces), the recent restriction of the right to silence when being questioned by police, and ‘mandatory prayers’ in schools. Whilst a Briton might well take issue with the suggestion that these necessarily mean that they have less autonomy than their American counterparts, this is significant for what it tells us about Etzioni’s view of Britain: that it is ‘a rather free and orderly society, a far from perfect – yet a relatively communitarian – society.’ (Etzioni, 1997, p. 35)

Elsewhere he refers to Britain as ‘a rather communitarian society.’ (Etzioni, 1997, p. 56)

Another way in which the Britain of the mid 1990s approaches more closely than his adopted country Etzioni’s communitarian ideal is in the realm of electoral politics.

Bemoaning the fact that in the US, elected officials are more accountable to campaign donors than to their electors and the communities they are supposed to represent, Etzioni explicitly suggests that a solution would be to adopt the British model of short election campaigns and strict limits on election expenditure (he notes with approval that agents who

overspend in Britain can be sent to prison). In Etzioni's eyes, then, Britain was a relatively communitarian society before New Labour came to power. The question is whether it has moved nearer to or further away from that ideal under the New Labour government, and what direction Labour's pre-election policy statements and rhetoric suggested.

Those commentators who perceive Etzioni as having been an influence upon the party, or at least have perceived that the party has moved in line with Etzioni's position, often do so on the basis that New Labour's policies and rhetoric suggest a more authoritarian approach. Yet Etzioni's view, in 1996, was that Britain was already a fairly communitarian country, and did not suffer from the excess of autonomy which he perceived in America. John Lloyd, in the *New Statesman*, notes that Etzioni believes that Britain "is about in balance"; and since it approaches closely to his golden mean, he is suspicious of proposals, advanced by the government, to reform it' (Lloyd, 1997, p. 29). This was written in June of 1997, and the government referred to is the new New Labour government. Etzioni's central claim in *The New Golden Rule* is that communitarianism is principally concerned with attaining the right balance between order and autonomy, and if Britain pre-New Labour had more or less achieved that, any move towards greater order, as perceptions of authoritarianism indicate, could only be a move away from communitarian balance.

In an article published in the *New Statesman* in 1995, Etzioni claims to 'see British society slipping in an American direction in terms of its moral infrastructure', but also says (earlier) 'I leave it to readers to determine what the UK most needs next – rights enshrined in a written British constitution perhaps, or a greater sense of personal and social responsibility' (Etzioni, 1995, p. 24).

In terms of the more general social and legal climate, New Labour have enacted laws that are more ‘authoritarian’ than before and thus presumably take Britain from a position of Etzionian communitarian balance towards an undesirable level of authoritarianism. These include the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act, which authorises broad email surveillance and limits the use of encryption; the proposed reduction in the right to select trial by jury; the 2001 Terrorism Act, which increases the number of organisations which it is a crime to be a member of or even to give support to; and measures, taken following anti-globalisation protests, which curtail the right to assembly and peaceful protest (all of which predated the September 11, 2001 attacks and the subsequent security clampdown).

However, it is mostly from *The Spirit of Community* that commentators have drawn parallels with New Labour. The first noticeable thing is how surprisingly little of what is in *The Spirit of Community* is taken up by those commentators who have claimed to see in it the seeds of New Labour thinking. Whole chapters go completely unremarked, including those dealing with topics as significant as political campaign funding, public safety and public health, and ‘hate speech’.

### **Family, education, community and morality**

Direct relevance in *The Spirit of Community* to British politics and policy can only be found in the book’s first section, which deals with ‘Shoring Up Morality’, and addresses issues of the family, education and community, and what Etzioni calls ‘the moral voice’. This last refers to the ways in which communities ideally keep their members in line by gentle ‘suasion’, examples of which include telling a neighbour that his lawn needs

mowing, and that failure to do so will reduce property values for the whole area, by recommending the services of a gardener (this apparently happened to Etzioni himself) (Etzioni, 1995a, p. 33). In general, he says, we should not be afraid to make moral claims on others and to make them feel guilty if they fail to meet those claims. This, and the other moral issues which Etzioni raises in this section cannot effectively be the subject of legislation, and are to a large degree outside the scope of politics, which limits their relevance to questions of New Labour policy. However, some of the rhetoric employed – again, by Blair in particular – does appear to reflect a similar attitude. For example, in the opening paragraphs of his 1995 party conference speech Blair refers to ‘a moral purpose to life. A set of values.’

It might be argued that measures such as anti-social behaviour orders are an extension of or a substitute for ‘suasion’, but that would be to miss Etzioni’s point: that the whole reason for shoring up ‘moral voices’ is to obviate the need for coercive legislation. In this way, much of what commentators have identified as communitarian in New Labour policy is actually its antithesis. Etzionian communitarianism seeks to avoid legislating to control people’s behaviour: ‘Communities gently chastise those who violate shared moral norms and express approbation for those who abide by them. They turn to the state (courts, police) only when all else fails’ (Etzioni, 1995a, p. ix; 1995b, p. 9). Blair’s words in this area suggest superficial similarities, but also highlight fundamental differences: ‘Strong communities depend on shared values and a recognition of the rights and duties of citizenship .... [W]here they are neglected we should not hesitate to encourage and even enforce them ...’ (Blair, 1998, p. 12). While such steps may be politically and socially

necessary, Etzioni's position is clear: they represent the failure of communitarianism, not its realisation.

Indeed, in some areas there are clear conflicts between Etzioni's position in *The Spirit of Community* and New Labour policy. One of these is the area of children and the family in relation to employment policy. Again, Etzioni holds Britain up as an example of a more communitarian approach than is available in the US (for example, in terms of maternity rights and parental leave); again, New Labour is moving policy away from, rather than towards, what Etzioni advocates. Etzioni stresses the need for both parents to spend time with their children, in order to discharge their duties both to their children and to the wider community (Etzioni, 1995a, p.54). Whilst conditions may be better in Britain than in the US, the UK still has the longest working hours in Europe, and New Labour has responded positively to calls from industry and commerce to apply the minimum regulation and limits on working times possible under European Union law.

Etzioni is certain that most childcare, largely because it is poorly paid and undervalued and hence tends to have a high staff turnover, is usually inferior to parental care, at least in the early years, and damaging to the subsequent attainment and behaviour of children. New Labour, in contrast, is keen to expand the role of childcare, in some cases through voluntary (i.e. not just poorly paid, but unpaid) provision, as part of its commitment to a work-based inclusion strategy and welfare policy. This is evidenced by the introduction of, among other things, childcare credits, the encouragement of childcare initiatives in employment-based regeneration programmes (such as the Single Regeneration Budget), the proliferation of 'after school clubs' for children of school age, and most clearly of all by efforts to get

lone parents into paid employment once their youngest child has started school, with compulsory employment service interviews. Etzioni quotes research showing that children who had after school care outside the home tended to have more problems, get lower grades and to be less liked by their peers than those who were cared for by parents. He concludes from this that maximising parental contact with children, even at the expense of parents' employment, does not cease to be vital once children have started school (Etzioni, 1995a, p. 59). This is clearly at odds with New Labour policy, in particular the New Deal for lone parents, which aims to get single parents into work as soon as their children have started school.

Finally, Etzioni is dubious about the apparent 'need' for income which he claims is driven by consumerism in a society in which 'parents are under pressure to earn more, whatever their income. They feel it is important to work overtime and to dedicate themselves to enhancing their incomes and advancing their careers' (Etzioni, 1995a, p. 66). It is certainly true that contemporary British society (even if to a lesser extent than the US) embraces both a work and a consumerist ethic, fuelled by television (for example, fashion, and house and garden 'makeovers') that although not initiated by the government is certainly not condemned by New Labour (as it is, for example, by the Green Party) and is often lauded. Etzioni's recommendation that '[c]orporations should provide six months of paid leave and another year and a half ... of unpaid leave', the costs of which should be shared by the employers of *both* parents, with a further six months of the unpaid eighteen being 'covered from public funds' seems unlikely to be realised in New Labour's business-friendly policies. Etzioni takes up a similar point when considering the decline of traditional community; it has, he says, been 'cannibalized' as 'more and more people have been

gobbled up by the economy' (Etzioni, 1995a, p. 136). One might perhaps imagine such sentiments being expressed by Prince Charles, but not by Tony Blair. In short, the central messages of *The Spirit of Community*, the work of Etzioni most closely associated by commentators with New Labour, actually offer the party very little comfort.

### **Etzioni on New Labour's Britain**

Etzioni's 2000 pamphlet, published by Demos, entitled *The Third Way to a Good Society*, explicitly engages with British politics. The idea of his brand of communitarianism as a 'third way' is not new to Etzioni; he has himself referred to it as such in, for example, *The New Golden Rule* (p. 7). What is new in this pamphlet is the explicit attempt to fit it into the British Third Way debate initiated by New Labour and led by Anthony Giddens (Blair, 1998; Giddens, 1998; 2000).

This is one of many ways in which Etzioni's *The Third Way to a Good Society* differs from *The Spirit of Community* and *The New Golden Rule*. Firstly, and most obviously, it is written explicitly as a contribution to a British debate, for a British audience, about British politics and society. *The Spirit of Community* and *The New Golden Rule* offered only passing nods to the British situation (for example, in the brief preface which was fairly obviously tacked on to the British edition of the former), and Etzioni's attitude to Britain in these works was sometimes contradictory and often superficial. However, having said that, there is actually very little in *The Third Way to a Good Society* which does relate exclusively to Britain. Examples are primarily drawn from US experiences, the language used is American, and references to Britain are frequently parenthetical and often seem

poorly understood. Nonetheless, this is a British publication and as such at least nominally addresses British questions in a way not attempted by the earlier books.

Secondly, there are signs in *The Third Way to a Good Society* that Etzioni has (although he does not specifically acknowledge this) taken on board some of the criticisms of the authoritarian implications or potential of his earlier communitarian work. (One such critic, interestingly, was Giddens, who in a letter to the *Independent* (06.07.1995) said that while '[n]ot all forms of communitarianism are authoritarian .... the authoritarian tinge of the more primitive versions advanced by Amitai Etzioni and others is plain to see.')

In part this is the result of a shift in emphasis: the focus is no longer on the balance between order and autonomy (as in *The New Golden Rule*) but rather on that between state, market and community. As such it concentrates more on the role of community in the development of relationships, such as mutual aid, rather than the maintenance of order (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 15). This is a different emphasis rather than a necessarily conflicting perspective, although Etzioni does come out strongly against legislating for 'good behaviour' and notes that 'attempts to suppress divorce, abortion and consumption of alcohol by law ... tend to backfire and should be avoided, whether or not one opposes those behaviours' (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 27)

Similarly, in *The Third Way to a Good Society*, Etzioni articulates the relationship between rights and duties in a more measured fashion than previously (at least, certainly more measured than his position has been generally understood, and far more nuanced than New Labour's understanding of the relationship), saying that in many areas, where the

relationship between them is ‘complex and tense’, ‘it is a grave mistake to presume that either rights or responsibilities are dominant .... [they] should be treated as two cardinal moral claims.’ Where they cannot both be maximised, ‘no *a priori* assumption should be made that priority will be given to one rather than the other’ (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 33). This might reflect a shift in position in the light of criticism (insofar as it is different from his previously articulated position), but it might also reflect Etzioni’s more generous attitude to Britain and its needs compared to those of the US (insofar as *The Third Way to a Good Society* is a British publication).

*The Third Way to a Good Society* is in large part a criticism of New Labour’s Third Way, in particular its perceived neglect of community, in its understanding of the Third Way as being concerned only with the relationship of state and market. For Etzioni, community is the ‘third leg’ of a three legged stool, and needs to be ‘lengthened’ to bring it into balance with the other two (state and market). Community provides what the other two cannot: an environment in which people are viewed ‘holistically’, and treated as ends in themselves rather than as means to others’ ends. This, for Etzioni, characterises the ‘good society’ of his title, and the values most conducive to it include ‘love, loyalty, caring and community’ (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 12) - values which are largely to be found in the family and the community. In the other spheres, people are treated not holistically as ends, but ‘only as employees, traders, consumers and even fellow citizens’ (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 11). This reference to ‘citizens’ suggests that Etzioni sees citizenship as part of the political, rather than the communal sphere, in contrast New Labour’s attempts to depoliticise the concept, by taking citizenship to refer to voluntary and community rather than political activity. This failure to allow community ‘its proper share of the social division of labour’ (Etzioni,

2000a, p. 13), Etzioni claims, is not just a feature of New Labour's Third Way, but of all conceptions of the Third Way to date. In other aspects, he says, the Third Way closely mirrors communitarian concerns (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 59n.6), and his Demos pamphlet is intended to provide the Third Way 'with a positive and normative characterisation as a public policy' (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 14).

This entails many criticisms of New Labour policy. In the main, these are not explicitly directed at the Blair government, but the policies, approaches and attitudes which Etzioni criticises are clearly recognisable as theirs. Far from being an implicit supporter of, or even influence upon, New Labour policies, Etzioni emerges, in this work to a greater extent even than before, as a cogent critic of many of those policies, and, furthermore, a critic from a communitarian perspective, suggesting that New Labour's position is too authoritarian to be considered communitarian - and this from an author whose own position, at least in the past, has itself been considered worryingly authoritarian.

Firstly, Etzioni's general criticism of the Third Way as neglecting community is clearly directed at New Labour as leading proponents of, and closely identified with, Third Way thinking. Although Blair in particular talks a lot about community, the concept does not feature in New Labour's understanding of the Third Way itself - at least, not in the way Etzioni understands it. For New Labour, the community is a locus of responsibility, rather than of ends-based relationships; their approach is society- rather than person-centred. Furthermore, in New Labour thinking, 'community' is often used as a synonym for society or even the nation as a whole, and 'community activity' for voluntary work.

In his own pamphlet on the Third Way Blair lists 'community' as one of four key Third Way values (the others are equal worth, opportunity for all, and responsibility) (Blair, 1998, p. 3), but it is accorded a bare paragraph in the twenty-page pamphlet, in which it is equated with 'civil society'. The 'core value' of community barely gets another mention, and even the single paragraph dedicated to it concludes that '[t]he truth is that freedom for the many requires strong government. A key challenge of progressive politics is to use the state as an enabling force, protecting effective communities and voluntary organisations and encouraging their growth to tackle new needs, in partnership as appropriate' (Blair, 1998, p. 4). In New Labour's Third Way the community is subordinate and instrumental, where it is considered at all. Although lip service is paid to the concept, Etzioni's criticism that the Third Way neglects community - and indeed lacks any meaningful conception of it - is well-founded. A Third Way which accorded community the same importance as Etzioni's does, and in the same way, would be very different from New Labour's.

Secondly, Etzioni is very critical of 'the rush to legislate good behaviour', and again, this looks like a fairly explicit criticism of New Labour measures such as Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) which serve to bring aspects of behaviour, which are not in themselves illegal, within the scope of the criminal law. 'Third Way governments do best', Etzioni says, when they resist this rush, as 'legislation often numbs the moral conscience', and can undermine the 'moral voices of the community.' Etzioni advocates 'relying on informal community-based processes' in preference to the law 'when there is a valid need to modify behaviour' (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 27). While the potential effectiveness of this, and the concept of community which it invokes, is certainly open to question, there is again no doubt that this represents a very different approach from New Labour's. Tony Blair, for

example, explicitly states that where the ‘duties of citizenship’ imposed by ‘an inclusive society’ ‘are neglected, we should not hesitate to encourage *and even enforce them*’ (Blair, 1998, p. 12). It is ironic that some critics of New Labour’s communitarianism cite measures like these, which Etzioni actually opposes, as evidence of his influence (Coote, 1995, p. 13). In fact the opposite is the case: a government consistent with Etzioni’s later work would eschew legislation like ASBOs.

Thirdly, New Labour’s conception of community as expressed through ‘voluntary activity’ is somewhat at odds with Etzioni’s understanding. Etzioni draws a clear distinction between ‘mutuality’ and ‘voluntarism’, with the former being characteristic of community relations, and providing a more important foundation for the ‘good society’. Mutuality, he says, ‘is a form of community relationship in which people help each other rather than merely helping those in need’. As examples of these, Etzioni cites community patrols, credit unions and ‘Local Food Buying Groups’ (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 19).

Although these are not very clearly defined, Etzioni is clear that ‘[i]n mutual relationships, people do not keep books on each other but have a generalised expectation that the other will do his or her turn if and when a need arises.’ On the basis that ‘[m]utuality is undermined when treated like an economic exchange of services’, Etzioni explicitly criticises policies such as ‘time banks’ which by ‘attempt[ing] to organise mutuality as an exchange will tend to undermine this moral foundation’ (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 20). Such a scheme was launched by Blair himself in March 2000 and it and similar schemes have frequently been invoked in the context of New Labour’s community policy.

On the next page, though, Etzioni does recognise a place for such voluntary action, which he believes should be further encouraged, through measures like those announced by Gordon Brown in February 2000 (Brown, 2000) - but as complementary to mutuality, rather than as expressions of it. In more general policy terms, although New Labour pay lip service to the ideals of 'commitment, trust and altruism [which] hold the fragile web of community together' (Blair, 2000b) they do tend to see responsibility as being exercised in an explicitly contractual fashion: 'opportunity or rights .... need to be matched by responsibility and duty. *That is the bargain or covenant at the heart of civil society*' (Blair, 2000a) - which is certainly at odds with Etzioni's professed community ideal.

### **Rights and duties, opportunities and responsibility**

It is the language of balancing rights and duties, of matching opportunities to responsibilities, which has done most to draw comparisons between Etzioni and New Labour. It is true that one important point made in *The Spirit of Community* and *The New Golden Rule* was that people have become too demanding of rights, too keen to expand the powerful language of rights, and insufficiently willing to perform the duties necessary to maintain an extensive network of rights. However, it is important to be aware that this reflects the situation in the US rather than the UK, and Etzioni says as much himself (Lloyd, 1997, p. 29; Etzioni, 2000a, p. 29). Because positive rights are enshrined in the American constitution, demands are more likely to be articulated in terms of rights, in an attempt to fit them into that pre-existing framework. Furthermore, the constitutional rights to privacy and freedom of speech lead - at least according to Etzioni - to strong objections to measures which in the UK are generally considered unexceptionable; for example,

checking whether a potential childcare worker has been convicted of child abuse, or whether a school bus driver is working under the influence of drugs (Etzioni, 1995b).

Etzioni's approach in *The Third Way to a Good Society* is different, and places far less stress on the potentially destructive aspects of rights. However, this more measured approach is not entirely new. In 1995, Etzioni wrote:

Rights and responsibilities are two sides of the same coin. First, a right is a moral and often legal claim on another person and hence becomes their responsibility. If the other side will not assume that responsibility, the right is meaningless. Thus, my right to free speech is dependent upon your accepting that you have a duty to allow me to say things that you find quite offensive. Second, rights are best anchored when people are members of well-integrated communities, and most endangered when there is only a crowd of isolated individuals.

(1995b, p. 24)

This demonstrates a more analytical interpretation of the relationship between rights and responsibilities/duties than that understood by New Labour, who present the relationship as conflictual rather than reciprocal, a conception manifested in the claim that 'a decent society is not based on rights. It is based on duty' (Blair, 1997). In *The Third Way to a*

*Good Society*, Etzioni is more explicit about how this understanding of the relationship emerges in policy, and in the process is firmly critical of New Labour's position.

When New Labour talk about rights and responsibilities, although this is often couched in the language of community and/or civil society, the rights they refer to are usually *welfare rights*, i.e. money, goods or services provided via the state, and the duties or responsibilities (the terms tend in this context to be used interchangeably) are those of individuals, frequently and most specifically individual beneficiaries of state action. Furthermore, 'community' is often used to mean the nation as a whole (for example, Blair asserts that a 'covenant of opportunities and responsibilities' is a prerequisite of government 'acting as a community' - here explicitly understood as a synonym for 'spending taxpayers' money on public services or social exclusion' (Blair, 2000a), and in 1994 he spoke of 'renewing our commitment as a nation, as a community of people ...' (Blair, 1994), or even government itself acting on behalf of that nation (David Blunkett, being interviewed about proposed increases in fines for the parents of truants was referring to the government when he said 'as the community, a strong community, we have put support measures in place ...' (Blunkett, 1999). Thus duties to the community become duties to the state or government, as representative of the nation, while rights are seen not as absolute and inhering in the individual, but as being in the gift of the state; for example, 'A young country gives rights, but demands responsibilities' (Blair, 1995).

For New Labour, then, the language of rights and responsibilities has become ever more explicitly contractual and conditional: 'For every new opportunity we offer, we demand responsibility in return. Responsibility means we no longer hand out social security

benefits without conditions' (Blair, 2000b) Although this kind of language is still generally perceived as a prime example of Etzioni's influence, as has already been noted, this is not an accurate representation. In *The Third Way to a Good Society* he asks:

What exactly is meant by 'rights *and* responsibilities'? Basic individual rights are inalienable, just as one's social obligations cannot be denied. However, it is a grave moral error to argue that there are 'no rights without responsibilities' or vice versa. Thus a person who evades taxes, neglects their children or fails to live up to their social responsibilities in some other way is still entitled to a fair trial, free speech and other basic rights. The number of basic rights we should have may be debated, but those that are legitimate are not conditional....[N]obody should be denied the basic necessities of life even if they have not lived up to their responsibilities, such as to find work (Etzioni, 2000a, pp. 29-30).

It is interesting to compare this to the speech, explicitly entitled 'Values and the Power of Community' in which Blair states unequivocally: 'If we invest so as to give the unemployed person the chance of a job, they have a responsibility to take it or lose benefit' (Blair, 2000a). Etzioni has also explicitly criticised another manifestation of this kind of contractualism in New Labour policy, the proposal to remove or reduce the benefits of people who breach community service orders imposed by the courts, as justified by Social

Security minister Alistair Darling in a letter to the *Guardian* (24th June 2000), in response to an editorial criticising the proposal, in which he said,

Surely it is not unreasonable to say to someone that if they enter into an agreement they should stick to it?...We are all responsible for our actions. Society is built on a contract. There are rights, yes, but there are responsibilities too.

When asked about this particular proposal, Etzioni condemned it as uncommunitarian, and was adamant that rights must be unconditional (Etzioni, 2000b).

Many more examples of New Labour's contractual view of the relationship of rights and duties could be provided, but this should be sufficient to demonstrate that on this point, on which comparisons are most frequently drawn, New Labour have much less in common with Etzioni than has been popularly supposed, and Etzioni has in fact been explicitly critical of their attitude, over a considerable period of time (certainly since 1995) and on a number of different occasions. While New Labour stress the dangers of people abusing an over-generous or insufficiently conditional welfare system, Etzioni suggests that 'if there are some who abuse the system,' - and he considers that there are not likely to be many such people, if work is available - 'a good society will consider this a small price to pay in order not to deny anyone's basic humanity' (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 32).

In his consideration of responsibilities, Etzioni makes a particular point of mentioning the responsibilities *of* the state: 'responsibility *from all*' entails that people will do whatever

they can for themselves and their communities, while ‘responsibility *for all*’ means, firstly respecting everybody equally and treating people without discrimination; secondly, and more importantly in this context, it means ‘ensuring that everyone has access to the basic necessities of life’ (Etzioni, 2000a, p.30). While voluntary and mutual organisations, extended families, charities and churches can meet some of these needs, they ‘cannot take on the final responsibility that all will be attended to. It is the responsibility of the state to ensure that such provisions are available to all.’ Basic provision, including ‘food, shelter, clothing and healthcare’ is essential in a society that treats people as ends: a good society requires this (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 31).

While this in itself is not in conflict with New Labour policy, the difference in emphasis, as with the issue of benefit fraud, is telling. In opposition, Blair could agree that the ‘covenant between society and each of its citizens’ ‘involves duties from society to citizen as well as the other way about’, but even then, this is quickly elided into the idea that ‘[a] society geared to extending opportunity [the extent of society’s duty] is one then able to demand responsibility .... to be much tougher and hard headed in the rules we apply and how we apply them’ (Blair, 1995a). Etzioni understands the state’s, and society’s, reciprocal responsibility to its citizens a good deal more broadly.

### **Equality, meritocracy and the market**

The theme of the state’s responsibility to individuals is linked to two further areas in which Etzioni does not (to put it mildly) wholeheartedly endorse New Labour policy: the concept

of equality and the ideal of meritocracy, and the role of the market. Blair has nailed his meritocratic colours to the mast, in a deliberate and explicit attempt to wrest back the language of 'Freedom. Choices. Opportunity. Aspiration and ambition' from the Conservative Party (Blair, 1996), claiming that '[a] meritocratic society is the only one that can exploit its economic chances to the full; and that means exploiting the talent of all its people' (Blair, 2000b). In his vision of the Third Way, Blair expresses a desire to 'highlight opportunity as a key value in the new politics.' The left, he says, at its worst, 'has stifled opportunity in the name of abstract equality' (Blair, 1998, p. 3).

For Etzioni, recognising all citizens' fundamental equality means that the state must ensure the provision of a 'rich basic minimum for all.' While 'less than equality of outcomes' this signifies 'more than equality of opportunity', and is a prerequisite of treating people as ends (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 12). Blair also says that what matters is 'equal worth, not equality of income or outcome, or, simply, equality of opportunity', but for Blair this means affirming 'our equal right to dignity, liberty, freedom from discrimination as well as economic *opportunity*' (Blair, 2000a). For Blair this is a social question, resolvable by community, whereas for Etzioni it is primarily an economic issue. Where Etzioni advocates a 'rich basic minimum for all', New Labour's measures focus on minimum standards for the working poor. Elsewhere Etzioni makes a plea for greater economic equality: 'The gap between rich and poor is too great. It is destructive of community. You can't get equality and you don't want it. But you should make things less unequal.' More surprisingly still, this is said in the context of an endorsement of codified socio-economic rights for both the US and the UK (Lloyd, p. 8).

Etzioni asserts that the 'good society is one that balances three often partially incompatible elements: the state, the market and the community' keeping each 'properly contained' (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 12). Not only has the community element been neglected; often, in third way discourse, the market has been allowed too much sway. A good society 'should view the market as akin to nuclear energy' as something which has great potential benefits, but 'must be watched over carefully.' A market which is not 'properly contained ... may dehumanise people and wreak havoc on local communities, families and social relations' (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 43). Etzioni notes that the US and the UK have gone furthest down the 'Thatcherised' road toward allowing markets a free rein, but that 'all Third Way Societies should be much clearer about the areas into which market forces must be prevented from intruding. This is essential if the proper balance between the instrumental realm and that of ends is to be achieved and sustained' (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 43).

New Labour in government has in fact expanded the role of the market into areas that even Margaret Thatcher balked at: the Royal Mail, air traffic control and prisons, for example. However, it is not only a question of the private sector taking over functions previously carried out directly by the state. Of greater influence on the lives of most people is the type and extent of government regulation of the private sector's activities, in particular in their role as employers. According to Etzioni, 'Third Way societies are currently making numerous incremental changes that favour market forces' (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 44). This actually applied more strongly to mainland Europe than to Britain, but only because the latter had already gone a considerable way down that road under the Conservatives. New Labour has adopted the European Social Chapter and introduced a minimum wage, but both policies have been implemented in such a way as to cause as little distress as possible

to the business sector, (Toynbee and Walker, pp. 112-3) and secured an opt-out clause, used only in Britain, which effectively emasculates the Working Time Directive.

The New Deal, and more broadly, Labour's approach to welfare is avowedly work-centred; furthermore, rather than attempt to create jobs directly (seen as a discredited Keynesian approach) it rests largely on supply-side measures to fit and encourage people to participate in the competitive *labour market*, in a country which has the longest working hours in Europe. Participation in the labour market, especially when hours are long, is often at the expense of participation in family or community activities.

Although Etzioni recognises that there is a 'close association between work and a sense of self worth, which is a vital foundation of ends-based relationships' (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 45), he does not see longer hours and greater flexibility as the solution; rather, a fairer distribution of work opportunities and pay: 'Surely it is better for all who seek and are able to work to be employed than for some to have high salaries and benefits well protected, only to be highly taxed in order to pay unemployment benefits to those who are kept out of the labour market' (Etzioni, 2000a, p. 46). In contrast, according to Polly Toynbee and Patrick Walker, New Labour 'mocked the French version of New Deal which created thousands of jobs and introduced the thirty-five hour working week to try to spread work to the workless by easing overwork for the employed' (p. 113) - the very solution suggested by Etzioni.

As noted earlier, it has been suggested that communitarian language has been used by New Labour as a cover for a shift away from egalitarian ideals, towards market neo-liberalism.

Whether or not this is the case, Etzioni's communitarianism actually has little to offer such an endeavour, and finds much to criticise in moves in that direction. Perceived similarities between Etzioni's brand of communitarianism and New Labour policies and rhetoric prove to be more apparent than real. There are, it is true, some overlaps, especially in the language used, but these have been considerably overstated, looking only at the actual words used but not at the respective understandings they represent. Etzioni's 'influence' has been vastly overstated, and his position is implicitly and often explicitly critical of many significant aspects of New Labour policy - including those identified in the popular mind most closely with him.

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